

Remarks at the Presidential Scholars Awards Presentation Ceremony June 21, 1995

Thank you. That was one of the more unusual introductions I've ever had. [Laughter] But I do have a lot more wrinkles inside and out than I had when I showed up here, grayer hair, and a few more scars, which are deeper wrinkles. But it has been a great joy, thanks in no small measure to people like those who have joined us here today.

I thank Secretary Riley and Secretary Kunin and all the fine people at the Education Department; the leaders of the education groups who are here; the members of the Commission for Presidential Scholars, Governor Sinner and others, who have served so well and who have selected all of you, so you know how wise they are. I thank them for their service to education, which is really service to our future.

I want to make a brief announcement before I make the comments I have to make to you about education. Most of the people my age who were drawn into public service—as I hope each of you in your own way will become a public servant, even as a private citizen—were attracted by the example set by President Kennedy and the people who came into his administration. Many people now know that when I was about your age I met President Kennedy here in the Rose Garden, 32 years ago next month. It inspired me and my entire generation to believe that we should ask not what our country could do for us but what we could do for our country, how we could serve.

And when I became President, I asked the American people to join me in a season of service. I asked the Congress to establish a national service corps, AmeriCorps, that would give our young people and sometimes people who aren't so young the opportunity to earn money for education but to do it by serving people here in our community, at the grassroots level, all across this country. That idea was inspired by the Peace Corps. And the Peace Corps continues the tradition of service that John Kennedy established to this day.

President Kennedy started the Peace Corps to help expand the circle of freedom and democracy when it was threatened by communism and by the cold war. But it has continued throughout all these years, in countries all across

the globe, to help people solve real problems, to go beyond language and racial and ethnic and religious and the political differences to unite us at the most fundamental human level in fulfilling our potential. The Peace Corps is very, very important.

Just a few weeks ago, my Director of the Peace Corps, Carol Bellamy, had the great honor to be named the head of UNICEF on behalf of the United Nations. And now I have to replace her. And today I want to announce that the distinguished gentleman behind me, who has been my faithful friend and aide for many years and is now the White House Communications Director, Mark Gearan, will be the new Director of the Peace Corps.

Mark, please stand up. [Applause] Thank you.

I think it would be fair to say that if we had a secret ballot for who the most popular person working in the White House is, Mark Gearan would probably win it in a walk. He has the understanding and the ability to build bridges and the tenacity to cross them. I am proud to nominate him to lead our Peace Corps into the 21st century, to keep the vision and the spirit of John Kennedy alive and the dream of America alive all over the world.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

I am very proud that all of you are here today, and I hope while you're here you'll have a chance to look around this magnificent city. I recently represented all of you in Kiev in the Ukraine, commemorating the end of World War II and the 50th anniversary of that. And the mayor of Kiev proudly told me that Kiev, of all the capital cities in the world, had the second largest percentage of its land in parkland and forest, exceeded only by Washington, DC.

I think it is the most beautiful capital city in the world. It is also full of our common history. If you walk through the Capitol or look at the White House or go over to the Lincoln Memorial or go up the hill leading to the eternal flame on President Kennedy's grave at Arlington, you have to imagine all that has taken place here. The White House just behind me has, after all, been here now for almost 200 years; it was opened in 1800. Every President but

George Washington has lived here. And he, of course, was responsible for building it.

When you put your hand in the river of our history, you can't help being touched by it and being changed by it. You have to be reminded of all this country has stood for and what it has accomplished. You also have to be sobered by the fact that not so far from here there live a lot of other young people your age who are among the poorest young people in our country, who live in some of the highest crime areas in our land, and have some of the most limited futures facing them. I'm very proud of the fact that year before last my Secret Service detail gave to the First Lady and me, as a Christmas present, the adoption of one of those schools to try to help give those young people a better future as well.

Today, as every day, the fundamental purpose of America is to preserve our freedom, maintain our democracy, and do what is necessary to help the American people make the most of their own lives.

There is a great debate going on here in Washington today. Those who want to shrink our Government sometimes say that the real problems of America are not after all economic, political, or educational, they're just personal, moral, and if you will, cultural. Well, at one level they're obviously right. None of you was brought here today by a Government program. None of you was brought here today even by the teachers whom you brought with you. If you had not been willing to study, to work hard, to make the most of your own lives, you would not have won this award and you would not be going on to the rich and full lives that you will doubtless lead. But it is also true that none of us, none of us, from the President on down, comes here to this tent alone. And to believe that is folly. We do have an obligation to make our country stronger so that we can make individual Americans stronger. And we do it together.

I ran for this job because I was really worried that your generation could become the first generation of Americans not to do as well as your parents. I ran for this job because I was worried that the diversity we have in our country, the incredible racial and ethnic diversity we have, could become more divisive than uniting, at a time when we're moving into a global society.

And believe me, no country on the face of the Earth, no other great country has the asset

America does in our diversity. Look around at you; look at each other. This is something that any intelligent nation would kill for, because in the global economy of the 21st century, how we relate to people who live beyond our borders, how we trade with them, how we learn with them, how we avoid conflict with them, how we work through our differences in honorable ways, how we bridge those cultural barriers will determine in no small measure what your future will be like. And America, because we are home to so many different people—one of our counties, Los Angeles County, has over 150 different racial and ethnic groups within one county. That is our meal ticket to the future. It is in so many ways the American dream. It must not be allowed to divide us. So I wanted us to have a better future and a more united future.

Now today, we are facing some stark choices. I've worked hard for the last 2½ years to try to get this economy going and to give our country a strategy that would deal with the problems of the moment but always keep our eyes on the long run. It is our responsibility here to always be thinking of the next generation, even when we have to make unpopular decisions to do it.

So we had this huge Government deficit, something we never had to worry about before about 12 years before I became President. And I did my best to try to bring it down. And we have reduced it dramatically in 2 years, but we did it in a way that allowed us to still increase our investment in education, increase our investment in technology, increase our investment in medical research, increase our investment in the future.

Now, make no mistake about it, it's very important to get rid of the deficit. Let me just give you two examples of how important it is. Our budget would be in balance today, and your generation would not have to worry about that, but for the interest we pay on the debt run up in the 12 years before I became President—never mind the previous 200, just in that 12—we would be in balance.

Our interest payments on the debt are so large that next year they will exceed our defense budget. Every year if we have to pay more and more and more on interest on the debt, it's less and less and less we can invest in education or technology or the care of poor young children

or needy seniors. This is a big deal, and it matters.

But the question is, how can we do it in a way that is good for the long-run and the short-run futures of America? We're at an historic moment because for the first time leaders of both parties who conspired to increase the debt in the 1980's have now agreed that we should balance our budget. And that is a good thing.

We owe it to your generation to end the policy that is only—basically was 12 years old when I became President, that we should always, always run a deficit no matter what the condition of the economy is. But there is a very different approach, as the Secretary of Education has said, between what I think we ought to do and what the Congress believes we ought to do. And it will affect your future and the future of those who will be under this tent in the years ahead, when we are long gone from here.

Now we'll both, the Congress and I, have to agree that we have to make big budget cuts. And if we're going to reach an agreement, we're both going to have to agree to give up the chance to score small political points and instead score a big victory for all Americans. But there are real differences here. There's a big difference between necessary budget cuts and unnecessary pain. There's a real difference between creating a stronger economy with the right kind of balanced budget and actually driving the country into a recession with the wrong kind of balanced budget. And we have to recognize, as all of you know and you look out to the rest of the world, the budget deficit is not the only deficit we have. We still have some education deficits. We've still got a lot of poor children and some social deficits. We've still got some technology deficits we need to close. We have to make some investments even as we close the deficit.

Now, let me give you an idea of something you may already know but, just for example, so that nobody is under any illusion about what's going on, you probably all know that more than half the American people are working harder today for the same or lower incomes than they were making 15 years ago, when you take account of inflation. You may know that people my age, men between the ages of 45 and 55, after you adjust for inflation, are working harder and making on average 14 percent less than

they were 10 years ago. Many of you may come from families with hard-working parents who have lost their jobs and been unemployed for protracted period of times or not been able to find new jobs that pay the same as their old jobs or have the same level of benefits.

More than anything else, this is because more and more people in America are working in a global economy where their income and their support is determined by their level of education. Earnings for high school drop-outs have plummeted in the last 15 years; they've dropped by more than 25 percent. Earnings for people who just graduate from high school have dropped in the last 15 years. Earnings for people who get 2 or more years of college have gone up or at least held steady. Earnings for people who have a college degree have gone up. You may know young people who got out of college who are still having a hard time finding a job. I know there are some, and I'm very concerned about it. But still, playing the odds, education is more important to the economic future of individual Americans and our entire country than it has ever been.

Now, in this kind of circumstance, cutting education would be like cutting the defense budget at the height of the cold war. It will undermine our common security. And we can balance the budget without doing it, and that's exactly what we ought to do.

Let me just tell you, my proposal is to balance the budget in 10 years. We've taken—we've gotten rid of a third of the deficit in 2 years. So, over a 12 year period, we would go from a huge deficit to zero. This huge deficit was run up in 12 years; we can take it down in 12 years.

My proposal would not have big tax cuts for upper income people who are doing pretty well in our economy today and don't really need them. We would save that money and put it back into education and into medical care for the elderly and others who are in real need.

Those are the two principal differences. Those 3 years give you millions of dreams, millions of American dreams. Let me tell you what a difference those 3 years and the size of the tax cuts can make. Specifically, I propose in my balanced budget to increase overall investment in education and training by \$40 billion in 7 years. The Congress proposes to reduce our investment in education and training by \$43 billion over the same period.

I propose to increase Head Start funding by \$1.5 billion by 2002, to reach another 50,000 children, for a total of 800,000. The House budget would cut up to 200,000 people from this year's Head Start rolls.

In the Goals 2000 program, which is a local reform, national standards program that promotes all kinds of grassroots reform, we propose to reach another 44 million children in 85,000 schools with Goals 2000, to support reforms that include things that people in Congress say they're for, like character education and charter schools and more public school choice. That's what we propose to do—44 million children getting help. Congress would kill support for Goals 2000. We want our kids to be thinking about learning, not about their safety, so we want to keep funding for safe and drug-free schools. Congress would cut the program by 30 percent and just give it to the States to figure out what to do with it.

I bet most of you are going to college, and I hope you are. For you and millions of other Americans, here is what is at stake. We want to increase the phase-in of our Federal direct loan program. That means we'll have more college loans at lower cost and better repayment terms. That means \$25 billion in loans to 6 million students a year at lower cost to everyone. The House budget proposal would eliminate the in-school interest exemption. That doesn't make a lot of sense to you. Let me tell you what it means.

It could mean that students who get college loans would have to pay \$3,000 more for their loan than under our plan. We want more people going to college, not less. I just gave you the economic statistics—the more college graduates we have, the higher incomes you have, the more people are paying taxes, the faster you bring the budget down. Isn't it better to bring the budget down with educated citizens than by cutting our nose off to spite our face by cutting education and cutting the college loans? That is a big, big mistake.

We want to increase the Pell grants to reach almost a million more students and raise the maximum award because there are a lot of poor young people out there that deserve a chance to go to college and need those Pell grants. The congressional budget would freeze this proposal for 7 years at the present level.

We want to expand the national service program to give a million people a chance to serve

their country and earn money for their education. The House of Representatives would eliminate it.

And we want to help adults as well. You know, when I was your age, over 80 percent of people who were laid off from their jobs were called back to the job they were laid off from. Now, over 80 percent of the people who are laid off from their jobs are not called back to the jobs from which they were laid off, and they have to try to find a new job. That is a stunning difference in a generation.

What does that mean? It means from the moment people are laid off they should be in a new training program if that's what they need. And we propose to collapse—the Department of Education, the Department of Labor are working on collapsing 70 different Government programs and adding more money into it to create a vast pool, kind of a scholarship pool for unemployed workers in America, so that they can apply and get a voucher or a chit worth \$2,600 a year to take to their local community college for up to 2 years to get the training they need. Every unemployed person in America would have it from the day they were unemployed. It will make a big difference to the future of this country.

I am saying this to you because you are going to college in this time. Your lives will be lived in an environment created by the decisions we make today. We are not talking about luxuries; we are talking about the things that made this country great.

And I want to close by asking all of you—I know you were invited to bring a teacher with you, and I want to ask all the teachers to stand. But before I do, I want everybody to look at the teachers who stand up here and ask yourselves if we are really going to build a better tomorrow by taking \$40 billion away from their ability to create more students like you. I think the answer is clear.

Would all the teachers here please stand today? Give them a hand. *[Applause]*

Congratulations again on your magnificent award. Good luck with your future. I wish you well. Remember this: One thing only you owe your country, your devotion to making sure that every other young person in this country will always have the opportunities that brought you to this day.

June 21 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1995

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:10 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks on Surgeon General Nominee Henry Foster June 21, 1995

The President. Good afternoon. I'd like to begin by saying that I was quite pleased that 57 of the Members of the Senate today voted to allow a simple up or down, yes or no vote on the nomination of Dr. Foster. A strong majority, 57, voted to give him a fair chance and a full vote. But a small minority are using this nomination to dictate a litmus test to the rest of America.

That is wrong. And the American people are not going to understand it. The Senators who voted to deny Dr. Foster an up or down vote did a disservice to a good man. They also did a disservice to our whole system of democracy. And make no mistake about it, this was not a vote about the right of the President to choose a Surgeon General. This was really a vote about every American woman's right to choose.

Henry Foster is qualified to be our Surgeon General. He spent 38 years in medicine. He spent a lot of his time working to improve the health of women and children in poor and rural areas. He's delivered thousands of babies and trained hundreds of young doctors. His efforts to curb teen pregnancy have earned him high praise among Republicans and Democrats. He shares my view that abortion should be rare and safe and legal.

Don't you think it's interesting that we finally found a person in this country who's actually done something, actually done something to try to reduce teen pregnancy, actually done something to try to convince large numbers of young people that they should not have sex before

they're married, who's actually done something to deal with this problem, but because he cannot pass the political litmus test that has a stranglehold on the other party, they cannot even allow a simple vote? Did the Democratic Senate deny a simple vote to their controversial nominees for the Supreme Court, a lifetime job? No.

This man got 57 votes—43 people say no because they are in the grip of people who don't question my right to choose him but question American women's right to choose. It is wrong. What's fair is fair, and he ought to get an up or down vote. He's actually done something about the problem they all claim to be concerned about, and he ought to be given a chance to do something about it for the whole country.

[At this point, Dr. Foster made brief remarks.]

The President. Let me just say one other thing. Let me remind you that the committee approved Dr. Foster's nomination. This should be about whether the President has a right to make this decision if the person is qualified. The committee ruled that he was. The only other question worth asking and answering right now is, are we going to try for another vote? Yes, we are. Do I know what the outcome will be? No, I don't. But I'm not through yet, and we're going to do our best to win it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:36 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Letter to Senator Robert Byrd on Proposed Drunk Driving Legislation June 21, 1995

Dear Robert:

Drinking and driving by young people is one of the nation's most serious threats to public

health and public safety. I am deeply concerned about this ongoing tragedy that kills thousands of young people every year. It's against the law